

Protect Yourself from Identity Theft

by Council President Scott Peters, District One

Last month we learned that an employee of the city of San Diego violated the public's trust by stealing the personal identifying information of at least four water department customers. This is disappointing news. I applaud Mayor Sanders for his willingness to so quickly come to the public with this information, and for his swift action to ensure such a violation cannot happen again.

The good news, if you can call it that, is that the police department believes that those four individuals are the only victims. But in a way, we are all victims of this crime. Citizens trust that the city will protect the private information they share with its various departments. A breach like this reminds us all how important and vulnerable our personal information is. Identity theft is one of the fastest growing crimes in San Diego, jeopardizing the credit rating and peace of mind of its victims. The city has an obligation to do all it can to protect that information.

Mayor Sanders has ordered that access be blocked immediately to water customers' private information such as Social Security numbers. The city will also conduct a top-down review of its security measures to make sure a crime like this does not happen again.

There are things we all can do personally to protect ourselves from identity theft. California residents are entitled to one free copy of their credit report each year from the three major credit bureaus. Check your credit file annually to be sure it does not contain fraudulent accounts.

Don't let your information fall into the wrong hands. Don't put your Social Security number on your checks, and avoid carrying your card in your wallet if possible. Never give your Social Security number to someone unless it is required, and ask what steps they take to protect your information. Protect your mail by investing in a locking mailbox. Reduce the number of pre-approved credit card offers you receive by calling 1-888-5-OPT-OUT.

You can find information on more ways to protect your identity online through the Identity Theft Resource Center, based in San Diego. Their web address is www.idtheftcenter.org.

Identity theft is a fast-growing crime that can affect anyone. Please take the necessary steps to protect your family's financial information.

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